



The Parthenon

Elementary Olympics Lesson Plans

2008 Summer Games

Beijing, China

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These lesson plans introduce elementary students to the ancient Olympic Games as well as the modern Olympics and makes connections between the games and art. Much of what we know about the ancient games comes to us through the arts – pottery, painting, sculpture, inscriptions, monuments, coins, poetry, etc., and the connection between the arts and the games continues with the modern games in the form of paintings and sculptures, posters, designs for medals and pins, and even the design of loveable mascots that represent the host city and country at each Olympiad. As the opening of school coincides with the opening of the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing, China, classroom teachers, physical education instructors, and art specialists can work together to explore the history of the games, track the progress of the current games, create their own personal fitness goals for the coming year, learn about the host country as well as participating countries, and make connections between art and athletics.

Curriculum Standards K-4:

Visual Arts:

- Students know that visual arts have both a history and specific relationship to various cultures.
- Students demonstrate how history, culture and the visual arts influence each other.
- Students identify connections between the visual arts and other disciplines in the curriculum

Physical Education:

- Students understand that physical activity provides opportunities for enjoyment, challenge, self-expression, and social interaction.

Language Arts:

- Students write narrative accounts to entertain and inform.

Learning Objectives:

- The learner will gain a general understanding of Olympic history and geographical connection.
- The learner will discover similarities and differences between the ancient and modern Olympic Games.
- The learner will explore the site, competitive events, and festivities of the ancient games.
- The learner will understand and appreciate the connections between the arts and the Olympic Games throughout history.

Background Information for Teaching This Unit:

**The Ancient Olympics
776 BC-395 BC**

When we describe something as being *ancient*, what do we mean? (Let children discuss their understanding of the word, “ancient”, then look up the meaning in the dictionary.

To assist student with historical perspective and to gain an understanding of time and the placement of the ancient and modern Olympics, draw or direct students in producing a timeline. The timeline may be as detailed as the teacher wishes, based on grade level and the historical awareness of the class, but some key dates include the following:

776 BC	First Olympics held in Olympia to honor Zeus
438 BC	Completion of the Parthenon in Athens, Greece
1 AD	Birth of Jesus
395 AD	Last Olympics in Olympia as Christians halt any festival associated with pagan worship
476 AD	The fall of the Roman Empire
1492 AD	Voyage of Columbus to the Americas
1766 AD	British <i>archaeologist</i> Richard Chandler rediscovers the original site for the ancient Olympic Games in Olympia.
1776 AD	America’s Declaration of Independence
1861-65 AD	The Civil War in the United States
1875 AD	The German government sponsors an <i>excavation</i> of Olympia
1896 AD	The Modern Olympics begin in Athens, Greece
1996 AD	The centenary of the modern Olympics
2008 AD	The XXIX Olympic Games (modern) in Beijing, China

Vocabulary:

pagan: one who believes in or worships more than one god.

archaeologist: the scientific study of materials remains (fossils, artifacts, monuments) of past human cultures, life and activities

excavation: to dig out or remove

truce: an agreed upon secession of hostilities

oracle: a person through whom a deity is believed to speak

In ancient Greece, festivals honoring the gods and goddesses included sporting events, music, drama, processions to the temples and the sacrifices of animals. The Olympics, honoring the chief god, Zeus, were held every four years at Olympia in Greece from 776 BC – 395 BC.

Geography of the Ancient Games:

On a world map, direct students in locating Greece. Using colored pins and a string, connect your home town to ancient Olympia. The location of Olympia was midway up the western coast of the largest island southwest of, and almost touching the mainland. This island is called *Peloponnese*. During the ancient Olympics, there was no unified country called Greece, but only a group of city-states – Athens, Sparta, Thebes, Argos, Corinth, and Magara to name a few of the major ones. Over time, athletes from places as far away as Spain and the African continent traveled to Olympia to participate in the games. In today’s modern Olympic Games we hear chants such as “USA! USA!” and the competing nations keep up with the number of medals won by their team. But in the ancient games there would have been no such cheers for “Sparta!” or “Athens!” Because each athlete competed as an *individual* rather than as a team member, the crowds chanted the names of the competitors. Most ancient athletes traveled the *circuit* participating in athletic contests in Delphi, Corinth, and Nemea as well as Olympia in much the same way a modern US athlete might compete in the U.S. Nationals, the Pan-American Games, and the World Championships before selection for the U.S. Olympic team. A hallmark of the ancient Olympics was the *truce* – the secession of war and the guarantee of safe travel for athletes and those attending the Olympics.

Located on a grassy plain where the Rivers Alpheios and Cladeus meet, Olympia hosted the ancient games until 391 AD when the Roman Emperor Theodosius I issued a decree banning pagan festivals and practices. Four years later, following an effort to move the games to Rome, the ancient site fell into disuse. The ravages of men, time, and nature (including earthquakes and floods) finally buried the site until rediscovered by an English archaeologist, Richard Chandler, in 1766. It was not until over one hundred years later that archaeologists began digging at the site.

Beginning of the Ancient Games:

As with much of Greek history, there are several versions about how the games started. The **first** *mythical* version says that Herakles started the Olympics to celebrate successful completion of one of his twelve “labors” – the cleaning of the King’s cattle stalls. The **second** version surmises that the games evolved from *funeral celebrations* for local heroes. The **third** version gives credit to King Iphitos of Elis, following the *advice of the Oracle of Delphi* to use sport and the truce to stop war. The **final** version bases the start of the games on the *Lunar Calendar*, so that the festival marked the time when the crops were in and the men were ready to relax and celebrate the harvest.

The Ancient Site at Olympus:

The ancient location for the Olympics had approximately thirty-five buildings, monuments and sacred sites, including *The Sacred Altar to Zeus* (a thirty-foot high mound comprised of ashes from sacrifices to the god), *The Sacred Olive Tree* (supposedly planted by Herakles and used to make the Olympic crowns for victors), and the *Altis* (sacred grove).

Temples, accommodations for athletes and visitors, training facilities, and athletic venues dotted the plain. For example, a gymnasium, bathhouse, swimming pool, and banquet hall available at Olympia catered to the needs of the athletes. The Sports Complex included the *Stadium*, site for running and most other events, as well as the *Hippodrome* for the horse and chariot races.

The focal point of Olympia was the *Temple of Zeus*. Completed in 456 BC (eighteen years before the Parthenon in Athens), this Doric temple housed one of the *Seven Wonders of the Ancient World* – the 51 ft. ivory and gold statue of Zeus.

Below, look at the differences and similarities between the Temple of Zeus and the Parthenon (the replica of which is here in Nashville, Tennessee).

Temple of Zeus

Doric Style
One room (Naos)
34 exterior columns
Constructed of marble from Mt. Pentelicon
Statue of Zeus by Phidaeus
Zeus (51 ft. tall, seated)
Statue of ivory and gold
Reflecting pool in front of statue
East Pediment: Zeus/Chariot Races
West Pediment: Battle with Centaurs
Roofline: lion’s head waterspouts

Parthenon

Doric Style
Two rooms (Naos and Treasury)
58 exterior columns
Constructed of marble from Mt. Pentelicon
Statue of Athena by Phidaeus
Athena (42 ft. tall, standing)
Statue of ivory and gold
Reflecting pool in front of statue
East Pediment: Birth of Athena
West Pediment: Athena and Poseidon
Roofline: lion’s head waterspouts

Ancient Olympic Events:

The first 13 Olympic Games featured only one event, a foot-race of 200 yards. Slowly, other events were added until the games included the following:

Running Events:

Stade Race -One length of the stadium. The winner had the Olympiad named for him.

Diaulos -Two lengths of the stadium

Dolichos -20-24 lengths of the stadium

Hoplitodromia- Race in armor

(A Hoplite was a heavily armed foot soldier)

Pentathlon: The test of the best all-round athlete, featuring competitions in discus, long jump, javelin, running, and wrestling.

Long Jump: Similar to today's long jump events except the ancient jumper used a jumping weight (Halter) in each hand that he would swing forward to propel him and swing backward as he landed to provide the final thrust for added inches, dropping the weight so that he would not sit back in the sand.

Wrestling: Wrestlers had to take down the opponent in three falls to win. Participants wore leather head gear, and much of what we know about the sport comes from scenes on pottery. The *Pankration* was the most violent form of wrestling – often to the death – and involved the most prize money.

Boxing: Legend says that the hero Theseus was the innovator of boxing under the guidance of Athena, who made up the rules. Again, much of what we know comes from scenes painted on pottery, indicating the punches included the hook and the upper cut. Boxers used leather thongs tied to their hands, evolving into a boxing glove.

Equestrian Events: There were two types: the horse race and the chariot race. Both events took place in the Hippodrome. The chariot races were divided into two types: teams of two horses and teams of four horses. Only the wealthy could afford to compete in these events because of the cost of keeping, training, and transporting the horses and chariots.

The program of the ancient Olympics:

1st Day: Opening ceremonies, Stade Race, wrestling, and boxing.

2nd Day: Single horse race, 12 lap chariot race, pentathlon.

3rd Day: Longer foot races (diaulos and dolichos).

4th Day: Men's wrestling, boxing, Pankration, race in armor.

5th Day: Crowning of winners, feasting and celebration.

The Modern Olympic Games

After the decline of the ancient Olympics in 395 BC, the world waited over 1500 years before a push began to reinstate the games. The rediscovery of the site in 1766 by British archaeologist Richard Chandler coincided with the push for classical education in Europe and the American colonies as well as the simultaneous Greek Revival in art and architecture. **(Ask students to think of local or national examples of Greek Revival architecture from the late-1700s –mid-1800s.** Part of the renewed enthusiasm came from news of interest in the site of the Olympiad in the 1870s and the first efforts by archaeologists from Germany to excavate the site. Imagine the excitement of uncovering relics and ruins of buildings that had been “lost” for 1500 years!

But the man credited as the founder of the Modern Olympics is Frenchman **Pierre DeCoubertin** who urged competitiveness and team spirit among the nations of the world. The first modern games took place in Athens, Greece in 1896. Since that time, the summer games, held every four years, have taken the prominent role in international sport. Organized under the auspices of the IOC (International Olympic Committee), the games continually added events. In 1924 the winter games at Chamoinix, France gained recognition as the first Winter Olympics.

Activity I:

Ask students to pretend to be on the team of German archaeologists in the 1870s preparing to excavate the Olympic site – buried for 1500 years under layers of dirt, rock, and water. Have the students begin with a list of things they expect to uncover at the site – buildings, monuments, relics, coins, etc. Consider the types of locations – dormitories, event venues, temples, kitchens, horse tracks, or banquet halls in making their list of expected “finds.”

Activity 2:

Consider the following questions facing the archaeologists uncovering the ancient site:

- The focal point, the Temple of Zeus, would have been located at the center of the Olympic grounds with other buildings radiating from that location. **Why would finding the location of the Temple of Zeus make your excavation job easier?**
- With everything under layers of dirt and rock, **how do you determine the possible location of the Temple of Zeus?** A clue: remember that the valley is located at a spot where the Rivers Alpheios and Cladieus meet. Using this information would mathematical skills and calculations assist you in finding the logical location?
- In their collection of tools for the *dig*, the archaeologists bring brushes of various sizes, but no shovels. **Ask students for their opinions as to why.**
- When a member of the team uncovers a foundation or a portion of a wall, everyone stops what they are doing until the entire wall is uncovered. **Why?**
- Buckets full of dirt are carried, bucket load by bucket load to a special station where team members have a square wooden box with wire screening as the bottom of the box for sifting the dirt. **Why would this be an important process in excavation of the site?**

- As each item, wall, foundation, bone, or remnant of food are found, archaeologists record the exact location of the find, the depth, a description of the object, and any other information such as date or era of the object, and its possible use. **Ask students why this information would be helpful in piecing together the overall picture of the site and how museums would use this information.**

Activity 3:

Teacher Instructions: This activity is broken down into two parts, allowing students to make comparisons between the ancient Olympic Games and the modern Olympics. Written in the form of a child's letter describing a visit to the games, each letter may be read to the class by the teacher or a costumed student (a boy readers dressed in a toga for the ancient games and a girl reader in modern sports attire for the modern games). At the conclusion of the readings, students may list similarities and differences between the ancient games and the modern games.

Letter 1
By Domenikos, age 9
Written in 436 BC

Dear Mother:

Olympia is very beautiful. There are a lot of big buildings with columns and statues. I like the Temple of Zeus best. Inside the temple is a big statue of the god seated on a golden throne. Father took me upstairs to the balcony and I saw the head of Zeus up close. Looking down on the people, I felt like Zeus.

On the first day of the Olympics we went to an open square. The sound of trumpets opened the games and the sacrifice of a boar to the god Zeus was made. Father and Uncle Stylos stood with the other athletes and announced their names and told that they were from Sparta. There are athletes from other places such as Athens and Corinth. The athletes and judges took an oath to obey the rules.

Father and I went to the big stadium to watch Uncle Stylos run his race. We stood on the grassy bank with a big crowd of men, but I could see everything. If women were allowed to come to the games, you would have been proud watching Uncle Stylos as he and the other athletes entered the stadium through a tunnel to the cheers of the crowd. The runners lined up along a stone starting line. One man tripped the runner beside him and was later punished. Uncle Stylos ran very fast and won the race. We cheered and cheered. At the end of the race, the judges named Uncle Stylos as the winner and also announced grandfather's name and the name of our city. I was so

proud that because Uncle Stylos won the Stade race, these Olympic Games will be named for him.

Tomorrow is the day for the 12-lap chariot race and Father races his team of four horses. Father said it is important to run ahead of the other chariots so he will not wreck in the turns. I can't wait to see Father win and hear his name called.

*Love,
Domenikos*

Letter 2
By Chandra Lindsey, age 14
Written in 2008

Dear Grandmother:

I still can't believe I'm an Olympian athlete. I'm writing from the athlete's village here in Beijing, China. It is very big and beautiful – especially the stadium which looks like a big basket or bird's nest. Some athletes are being housed here and some athletes are staying in other cities and traveling in for their events because of the air pollution. Alisha Morgan is my roommate. You met her at gymnastic Nationals.

Tonight we had the opening ceremonies. It was very exciting. When we were going to the stadium we passed the huge Olympic flag with its five rings. I'm not sure which of the colorful rings represents our continent (the red, blue, yellow, green or black). I'll have to ask someone. The team from Greece is always the first to enter the stadium because the Olympics started in ancient Greece. Did you know that? Then the other nations follow in alphabetical order. Our United States team was one of the last to enter, but one of the biggest. It was fun to come through the tunnel and suddenly the bright lights and color hits you and the sound of the crowd is deafening, but wonderful. It was so thrilling and exciting. I just kept saying to myself, "I'm here in the Olympics!" and I could not help but to cry with joy.

When every nation had entered, we stood as the Olympic flag was carried into the stadium and raised slowly up the flagpole as the choir sang "*The Olympic Hymn*" in Chinese. An athlete led us all in taking the oath. We promised to abide by the rules and this year the oath included a promise not to use drugs. Athletes who break the rules or use drugs are punished by disqualification. The judges also took an oath and the Olympic torch was carried into the stadium and lit the cauldron. It was awesome.

Tomorrow, I am going to begin my gymnastics competition. We compete both as members of a team and as individuals. I'm nervous about the uneven parallel bars, but I feel confident about my other routines. I am one

of the youngest competitors, so I'm trying to take pressure off myself by telling myself that I will have other Olympics in the future and although I want to medal, this Olympics just gives me a taste of what to expect. It was easier to convince myself of this when I was at training camp. Now that I'm here, I really feel the pressure. Be sure to watch me on TV. This is AWESOME!!!!

I love you,

Chandra

Activity 4:

As a final activity, ask students to consider the following: Only a few athletes who go to the Olympics will win a medal. Many athletes know going in, that their chances to reach the winner's platform are slim or nonexistent because they do not have the times or strength or skill levels of many of their competitors. What do your students believe are the things these athletes *win* by participating in the Olympic Games?

It is hoped that by exploring this material your students will gain a new perspective on the Olympic Games as they watch over these two weeks; that they will gain new insight into the sacrifices and incredible hard work made by these athletes to reach this level of competition; and that they will see beyond the medal count, the individual triumphs of all of these athletes.